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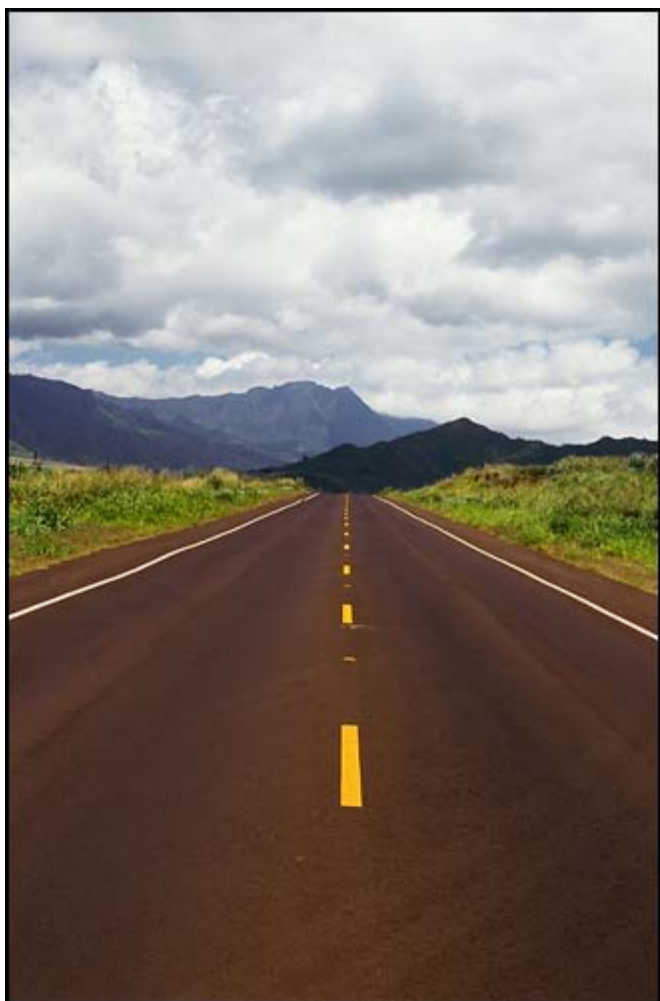
Shortfall may stall widening of 93

Federal Highway Trust Fund expected to hit zero balance, budget fix at risk

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KINGMAN - The Federal Highway Trust Fund is broke.

Unless Congress does something about it soon, the lack of funds could put Arizona Department of Transportation's U.S. 93 lane-widening project on indefinite hiatus.

In a news release issued Friday, ADOT stated that the federal fund was expected to hit a zero balance by month's end, following a substantial drop in collections over the past two years. The Senate is considering an \$8 billion injection of general fund monies to assuage the crisis temporarily, but according to a report from the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, senators are having a difficult time reaching a consensus on the bill due to objections from Republicans Judd Gregg of New Hampshire and James DeMint of South Carolina.

"A number of behind-the-scenes meetings have occurred by members and staff of the Senate Environment and Public Works, Finance and Appropriations committees, as well as Senate leadership, to attempt to move the bill under unanimous consent," the report stated.

If the bill fails to pass, the most immediate effect for Kingman would be ADOT's freezing of the \$107 million project to widen U.S. Route 93 from a two-lane road to a four-lane divided highway as it approaches Hoover Dam. The project's completion is slated to coincide with the completion of the Hoover Dam bypass in late 2010.

"While not all work in the state receives federal aid, many construction projects receive some degree of reimbursement from the Federal Highway Fund," ADOT Public Relation Officer Michele Beggs said. "Ninety-five percent of that particular project is federally funded; that means if the federal government does not come through with a solution - and that means an \$8 billion fix for the current budget year - this project will be postponed indefinitely."

ADOT estimates that as many as \$171 million in Arizona highway projects could be delayed similarly by the

lack of funding over the next year.

In 2007, Arizona received approximately \$650 million from the federal fund, \$235 million of which went to various ADOT projects across the state.

"ADOT's annual trust fund allocation supports about 8,000 jobs in the state," Beggs said.

Though the Route 93 project could be postponed, ADOT still intends on going through with the bidding process. Bidding is scheduled to open Sept. 26, though Beggs said the successful bid might not be awarded until after the funding crisis is resolved.

"We're watching the federal government's news releases daily, and we're waiting," she said. "Again, we're hopeful something's going to happen. They're still working on it."

Beggs said local state-funded projects, particularly the \$18 million allocated for the Rattlesnake Wash interchange, would not be affected by the federal fund shortage.

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